

# Workplace spirituality and the ethical behaviour of project managers



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**Orientation:** Despite increased interest in the topic of ethical behaviour, the unethical behaviour of individuals in various professions is increasing. In order to support professional bodies in their quest to promote ethical behaviour of professionals, one needs to consider what organisations can do to promote ethical conduct.

**Research purpose:** The purpose of this research study was to investigate whether organisations that have spiritual values, that is, workplace spirituality, have a significant impact on the ethical behaviour of project managers.

**Motivation for the study:** Project management as a profession has always been concerned about quality and ethics, but ethical behaviour seems to be on the increase rather than on the decrease. Therefore, it is necessary to consider factors within the organisational context that can promote ethical behaviour.

**Research approach/design and method:** The study was quantitative in nature, and data were collected from individuals studying towards a project management qualification. A descriptive case study design was used and data were collected once-off by means of a survey.

**Main findings:** The findings of the study indicated that workplace spirituality influenced ethical behaviour to some extent, as it promotes responsibility and fairness, which are key values of the Project Management Institute.

**Practical/managerial implications:** If organisations adopt spiritual values and promote a spirituality-based culture, ethical behaviour could be encouraged. However, workplace spirituality should not be seen as a quick fix to reduce unethical behaviour, and unless there is honest commitment by organisational leaders to transform organisations into humanised and spirituality-based workplaces, not much will be achieved in terms of promoting ethical behaviour.

**Contribution/value-add:** The study contributes to the literature regarding ethical behaviour and workplace spirituality.

**Keywords:** Workplace Spirituality; Ethical Behaviour; Values; Project Management; Ethical Conduct.

## Introduction

In today's knowledge economy, professionals are increasingly confronted with ethical dilemmas. One argument offered for this occurrence is that progress and evolution do not necessarily equate with what is best for society (Coccia & Bellitoo, 2018), and, as such, proceeding towards what is better can only be attained when the right tasks are performed in the right ways (Halis, Akova, & Tagraf, 2007). In many African developing countries, unethical behaviour is often widespread (Turyakira, 2018), which implies that more emphasis should be placed on ethical behaviour in these countries. In South Africa in particular, unethical behaviour has reached 'crisis proportions' (Patel, 2013, p. 1), which shows that individuals from different professions find it increasingly difficult to distinguish between right and wrong. Project management as a profession has always been concerned with quality and ethics; for this reason, professional bodies, such as the Project Management Institute (PMI), value ethics and actively support ethical conduct by their members (Rigamonti, 2016). Unfortunately, ethical behaviour cannot be promoted by ethics training, although it can potentially enhance intellectual awareness thereof (Bowden & Smythe, 2008). Therefore, it is necessary to consider factors within the organisational context that can promote ethical behaviour.

What complicates the understanding and predictability of ethical behaviour is that worldwide people differ in what they view as right and wrong and what they regard as morally relevant

(Niemi & Young, 2013). In this regard, scholars have asserted that spirituality is empirically and theoretically linked to ethical cognitions, and that it may therefore be regarded as a critical factor determining how employees perceive an ethical situation (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003b). In South Africa, unethical behaviour is at times even rationalised so that individuals can convince themselves that they are not corrupt and that their acts are justified and acceptable (De Klerk, 2017). It is reported that rationalisation is the leading motivation factor for committing fraud because employees think that it will not hurt anyone, it is for a good reason or it will be rectified before anyone finds it out, or that they will not get caught (Global Economic Crime and Fraud Survey, 2018). This implies a general lack of understanding of what constitutes an ethical behaviour, and a lack of awareness of the consequences of unethical behaviour. Therefore, a descriptive approach to ethical behaviour through the creation of a professional code of conduct still seems relevant for South Africa.

It is critical that project managers act in an ethical manner so as to ensure that projects are successfully completed in line with corporate strategy. The PMI, as the professional body of project management overseeing the conduct of project management professionals, is very much concerned with the ethical behaviour of its members. As such, the PMI has developed a Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. The purpose of a professional code of conduct seems to be twofold (Grobler et al., 2012). Firstly, it serves as 'moral anchors' to embody a profession's values so as to create an ethical climate and to provide a framework for evaluating alternative courses of action. Secondly, it reassures stakeholders that a profession's activities are underpinned by moral principles, and it provides them with a benchmark to evaluate the professional conduct of a profession. However, project managers are functioning within an organisational context and therefore it is necessary to consider how organisations can facilitate the ethical behaviour of these professionals.

Recent research has indicated that within South African workplaces, there is an increased need for employees and employers to find meaning, holistic well-being and mental health in their respective professions (Mayer & Walach, 2018). It is possible that if spiritual workplaces are created, then employees' well-being and mental health can be improved and unethical behaviour can be reduced. To create such spiritual workplaces, however, requires sound management that embraces spiritual values and is committed towards ethical behaviour. Carroll (2012) reported that 85% of employees in his study indicated that the spirituality of leaders influences their organisations. Fry (2005, p. 695) defines spiritual leadership as 'the values, attitudes, and behaviours required to intrinsically motivate one's self and others in order to have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership'. Thus, through spiritual leadership, spiritual workplaces can be created, in which ethical behaviour is envisioned, valued and rewarded.

Workplace spirituality can be considered from an individual and/or organisational perspective (Kolodinsky, Giacalone, & Jurkiewicz, 2008). From an organisational perspective, Mitroff and Denton (1999) found that organisations with a strong sense of spirituality (i.e. spiritual climate and organisational culture) allow employees to exercise stronger values and ethical beliefs in the workplace. Scholars (Ahmad & Omar, 2014) have also found that employees who experience workplace spirituality are more likely to be satisfied with their work and are less likely to engage in deviant workplace behaviour. On the other hand, from an individual or personal perspective, spiritually inclined individuals have been found to be ethical in business, because they demonstrate enhanced teamwork, greater kindness and fairness, increased awareness about others' needs, honesty and trust (McGhee & Grant, 2008). These latter scholars also maintain that spiritual individuals can perceive the ethical nature of business issues more clearly and are more sensitive to corporate social performance. Similar sentiments were mentioned by Fry (2003, p. 49), who states that spiritual leadership theory focuses on standards and criteria of behaviour that lead to positive health and ethical and spiritual well-being. Despite these findings, Kolodinsky et al. (2008) argue that organisation-centred spirituality is a better predictor of key outcomes than individual-centred spirituality. In line with this argument, the current study investigates workplace spirituality from an organisational perspective.

It is generally agreed that workplace spirituality comprises three key dimensions, namely, the inner life, meaningful and purposeful work, and a sense of community and connectedness (Houghton, Neck, & Krishnakumar, 2016). Focusing on meaning and purpose, Gull and Doh (2004) postulated that employees who become more engaged can work more responsibly, ethically and collaboratively with others when they find meaning in their work activities. In another study, Beekun and Westerman (2012) found that spirituality alone does not determine ethical behaviour, and that the simultaneous impact of spirituality, peer pressure and national culture should be considered. Although cognisance is taken of these findings, previous research studies have not focused on the relationship between ethical behaviour and workplace spirituality among project managers. Furthermore, Houghton et al. (2016) stated that mixed evidence has been reported regarding the relationship between workplace spirituality and ethical behaviours in the workplace. As such, it is necessary to confirm and extend previous research findings within this context.

## Research purpose and objectives

The purpose of this research study was to investigate whether organisations that have spiritual values, that is, workplace spirituality, have a significant impact on the ethical behaviour of project managers. The primary research objective of the study was to establish to what degree, if any, workplace spirituality influences project managers' ethical behaviour.

The secondary research objective of the study was to determine the extent to which project managers agree with the ethical values identified by the PMI as important.

## Literature review

### Ethical behaviour of project managers

The word 'ethics' is derived from the Greek word *ethos*, which initially referred to habitual conduct, usages, customs and character (Melden, 1967, p. 1). Ethics has more recently been defined as 'the study of moral principles or values that determine whether conduct or actions are right or wrong' (Werner & Bagrain, 2011, p. 45). It has also been defined as 'the morality of human conduct' (Edwards & Mauthner, 2012, p. 14). Clearly, these recent definitions make reference to morality, moral principles and moral values. The term 'morality' is derived from the Latin word *mos*, which means 'virtue', and 'moral', which means 'ethical' or 'conforming to ethics' (Halis et al., 2007, p. 129). Morality is mainly concerned with the good and the bad that guide an individual's beliefs and actions (Halis et al., 2007). Crossan, Mazutis and Seijts (cited in Molina, 2016, p. 6) explain that 'the term moral moves beyond values and virtues to incorporate societal norms about what ought or should be done, or what is valuable'. Thus, the concept of ethics includes both the rules and principles that guide the conduct one has to observe within society and the philosophy thereof (Halis et al., 2007).

To provide guidelines or clarity regarding expected ethical conduct, many companies and professional bodies publish a code of conduct, which employees and/or members have to adhere to (Larson & Gray, 2014). The Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct of the PMI is based on four values, namely, honesty, responsibility, respect and fairness, which are regarded as core values to the project management profession (PMI, 2017a). The four values are defined as follows (Kerzner, 2013):

- responsibility – this includes taking ownership of the decisions project managers make, or the failure to make decisions, as well as the consequences thereof, whether good or bad
- respect – this refers to the manner in which project managers regard themselves as well as the resources provided to them
- fairness – this focuses on the manner in which decisions are made; decisions should be made in an impartial and objective manner and should be free from conflicts of interest, favouritism and prejudice
- honesty – this refers to acting in a truthful manner.

From the above values mentioned by the PMI, it is clear that through its Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, the PMI attempts to standardise the behaviour of project managers. Issa and Pick (2010) allude to the research theme of building up moral business communities through codes of ethics of professional bodies. However, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003a) argue that formal codes of ethics are mere general statements of principles that serve to articulate an organisation's (or a

professional body's) highest moral aspirations but not to dictate specific behaviours. Grobler et al. (2012) warn against a superficial approach to corporate ethics, where ethics is promoted solely as systems controlling behaviour because such an approach is consistent with the lowest level of moral development.

Previous research has established that ethical codes alone do not reduce unethical behaviour (Somers, 2001, cited in Fernando & Chowdhury, 2010). It has also been noted that individuals differ in their assessment of questionable practices, and, as such, they may engage in such unethical practices without moral restraint (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003b). Thus, although the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct of the PMI is adopted by the project management profession, project managers will not necessarily abide by it. Furthermore, despite continued research in the field of ethics, the occurrence of ethical behaviour in the workplace, in particular in South Africa, seems to increase rather than decrease. This raises the question of whether there is not a more effective way that ethical behaviour can be guided and promoted, such as the creation of spiritual workplaces.

### Workplace spirituality

The term 'spirituality' is derived from the Latin word *spiritus*, which means something that gives life to physical organisms, or *spiritualis*, which means breath (Tecchio, Cunha, & Santos, 2016). The study of spirituality within the context of the workplace emerged in the 1980s largely because of employee unhappiness triggered by lost personal values (Eginli, 2017). Since its inception, workplace spirituality has attracted increased business and academic interest which can be attributed to indications that it encourages individual well-being and quality of life, and organisational effectiveness (Van Der Walt & De Klerk, 2015). Unfortunately, empirical studies investigating workplace spirituality have been insufficient, particularly in management and business research (Honiball, Geldenhuys, & Mayer, 2014, p. 291), which is concerning if one takes into consideration that it may advance individual and organisational well-being.

Owing to various reasons, such as the newness of the field of study and the personal nature of spirituality, there is an absence of a widely accepted definition of workplace spirituality, and it is therefore necessary to define the concept of workplace spirituality for a particular study (Karakas, 2010). As alluded to earlier in this study, workplace spirituality is investigated from an organisational perspective and is therefore regarded as the spiritual nature of the organisation itself, which is evidenced by spiritual organisational values and a culture that facilitates employees' experience and sense of connectedness with others in a way that promotes feelings of completeness and fulfilment, with the recognition of an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work in the context of the work community (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Kolodinsky et al., 2008).

An organisational culture is defined as 'an independent set of beliefs, values, behavioural tendencies and tools that become so common to an organisation that they maintain themselves over long periods of time' (Werner, 2011, p.251). Thus, an organisational culture dictates acceptable patterns of behaviour, such as integrity and ethical conduct, which become behavioural norms. Honiball et al. (2014) maintain that organisational cultures that are characterised by autonomy, trust, cohesiveness, support, recognition, innovation and fairness support employees' spiritual journeys to attain a sense of connectedness, and meaningful and purposeful work. They will not only support employees on their spiritual journeys but also positively influence employee behaviour (Werner, 2011). Therefore, it is possible that supportive organisational cultures that embrace spiritual values may promote ethical behaviour.

However, although workplace spirituality supports individual of personal spirituality, it does not necessarily predict or encourage such orientation. In essence, individual spirituality may be regarded as finding meaning and purpose in living, a value component, self-transcendence, an inner experience of events of living through thoughts, emotions and sensational experiences and the behavioural expression thereof, as well as connectedness to a higher being (Van Der Walt, 2008). This view of workplace spirituality focuses on spiritual transformation of the individual employee, which positively influences the organisational context (Pawar, 2009). This suggests that spiritual employees will be driven by an attitude based on personal values and philosophy (Kumar & Kumar, 2014), which provides them with a higher purpose and meaning in life and at work.

To transform organisational cultures to become spiritually based requires that organisational management shifts from self-centredness to interconnectedness, from self-interest to service and stewardship, and from a materialistic to a spiritual orientation (Karakas, 2010). To ensure such an organisational culture, the psychological climate should be perceived as consisting of dimensions such as autonomy, cohesion, trust, support, recognition, fairness and innovation (Koys & DeCotiis, 1991). Once these dimensions of the psychological climate are perceived positively, management will then be in a position to create spirituality-based organisational cultures that are characterised by having a strong sense of purpose, mutual trust, honesty and openness, humanistic work practices and tolerance of employee expression (De Klerk, 2005). Thus, it has been asserted that if organisational leadership is spiritual and is committed towards creating a spirituality-based organisational culture, employees will perceive and experience this spiritual orientation, which will lead to ethical behaviour.

Workplace spirituality holds many benefits for organisations (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). These benefits include fostering wholeness and integration, promotion of ethics and aesthetics in the workplace, assisting in the development of emotional and spiritual competence, developing an enhanced team and

community at work, empowering the workforce, promoting harmony within individuals and listening to others, better relations with others, an optimistic view of human nature, increased creativity and intuition, and more ethical behaviour (Honiball et al., 2014). This implies that if organisations become more spiritually inclined, they are likely to promote ethical behaviour, which points to a relationship between workplace spirituality and ethical behaviour.

## Research design

### Research approach

This study is situated in the positivist paradigm because it is assumed that reality is objective and functionally and politically necessary (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). As a result of the nature of this study, quantitative data were collected to answer the formulated research questions. The research design that was used in the study was a descriptive case study. By using a case study design, ethical behaviour and organisational spirituality could be understood within the context of project management. In order to establish the latter, primary empirical data had to be collected. This was executed by means of a cross-sectional study, which is often used during survey research to establish relationships between variables (Hair, Celsi, Money, Samouel, & Page, 2016). Individuals who are studying the phenomenon under investigation and some who are experiencing it commented on the subject area through collection of evidence. The primary unit of analysis was therefore individuals because questions were posed to individuals regarding their ethical behaviour and their perceptions of organisational spirituality.

### Research method

#### Research participants

Data were collected from senior students who were enrolled for a degree in project management at a higher education institution in South Africa. The reason for this was that these students were mostly working adults who could mindfully complete the questionnaire. Although the intention was to draw a representative sample from the sample frame, consisting of 649 students, it was not possible because the research had to rely on students who attended scheduled classes, during which the questionnaires were distributed and completed. Therefore, convenience sampling was used.

To establish the sample size, the Raosoft sample size calculator recommends a sample size of 242 for this population size, at a confidence level of 95%. Questionnaires were distributed during a contact session, and they were completed by the students and returned at a central point in the venue. Although 242 questionnaires were distributed, only 128 were returned and were usable, thus providing a response rate of 52.9%. It should be noted that data collection was done towards the end of the academic year and, therefore, new questionnaires could not be distributed to the respondents who did not return their questionnaires. Thus, it

was decided to commence with the data analysis because (1) a response rate of 50% is adequate for analysis and reporting (Babbie & Mouton, 2014) and (2) the statistician confirmed that a sufficient number of responses were received to execute the planned data analysis.

The final sample is described as follows, namely, the participants were South African citizens, mostly women (62.5%), black Africans (85.9%), between the ages of 36 and 45 years (50.8%), permanently employed (96.1%), having 6–10 years of work experience (28.1%), holding a certificate or a diploma (36.7%), working in managerial or supervisory positions (23.4%), employed by national government (80.5%) and having five or less years of experience in managerial positions (58.6%) and five or less years of project management experience (80.5%). Most of the sample participants (91.4%) stated that they were religious, with strong religious convictions (36.7%).

### Measuring instrument

Because a quantitative approach was adopted by the study, a structured questionnaire was used which consisted of closed-ended questions. Part of the questionnaire consisted of statements or questions that solicited biographical data. The rest of the questionnaire consisted of five-point Likert-scale closed-ended question items. The measuring instrument consisted of three sections. Section A of the questionnaire consisted of sociodemographic statements or questions. Section B consisted of 26 questions enquiring about ethical behaviour. This section was self-constructed and was based on the four values identified by the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct of the PMI, which are regarded as core values to the project management profession, namely, responsibility, respect, fairness and honesty. Items included in this section are, for example, 'I follow the rules of the organisation without favouritism' and 'I never share confidential information that has been entrusted to me'. Section C of the questionnaire consisted of 20 questions measuring organisational spirituality. The Organisational Spiritual Values Scale (OSVS) developed by Kolodinsky, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2004) was used to measure organisational spirituality, which consists of three dimensions, namely, awareness of life, compassion and larger context. Items included in the OSVS are, for example, 'in this organisation there is a sense of sacredness in life' and 'in this organisation we are encouraged to actively seek a sense of purpose in life'.

### Research procedure

Before the final questionnaire was distributed, a pilot study was conducted to establish whether the questions posed were appropriate, understandable and formulated clearly and concisely. The layout of the questionnaire was also assessed, and the time it takes to complete the questionnaire was established. Thus, the face validity was ensured. Furthermore, in order to ensure content validity, experts in the fields of project management and psychology were requested to evaluate the statements in the questionnaire, to establish whether they are appropriate to measure ethical

behaviour and organisational spirituality. To determine the initial internal consistency of the questionnaire, the Cronbach's alpha correlation coefficient was measured. The initial reliability of the subscale measuring ethical behaviour was 0.80, which may be regarded as very good, and organisational spirituality yielded a score of 0.90, which may be regarded as excellent (Hair et al., 2016). The final questionnaire was distributed to the sample in hard copy format. Data were collected by means of self-administered questionnaires. Primary data were collected once-off during a contact session with project management students.

### Ethical considerations

Various ethical considerations were applied to the research study. In order to ensure that participants provided informed consent to participate in the study, a cover letter describing the nature of the study and the nature of the required participation (Watkins, 2016) was attached to the questionnaire. Issues that are specifically addressed in the cover letter include the participants' rights to privacy, voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality. Permission was obtained from the participating organisation in order to conduct the research study.

### Statistical analysis

Data analysis was planned and directed by the researcher and an independent research psychologist. The data were captured by the researcher on an Excel spreadsheet, after which these were analysed by a research psychologist using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Firstly, the reliability of the measuring instrument was established by using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. A factor analysis was then performed to confirm the factor structure of the OSVS. Descriptive data analysis conducted included measures of central tendency, namely, means, medians, modes, standard deviations and correlations. To establish the relationship between organisational spirituality and ethical behaviour, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was measured. Inferential statistical analysis was conducted to establish the influence of workplace spirituality on ethical behaviour. A multiple regression analysis was performed to establish the influence of organisational spirituality (the independent variable) on ethical behaviour (the dependent variable). The regression-squared ( $R^2$ ) was calculated to explain the variance in ethical behaviour.

## Results

### Validity and reliability of the questionnaire

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for code of ethics yielded a score of 0.88, which may be regarded as very good, and organisational spirituality yielded a score of 0.94, which may be regarded as excellent. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for organisational spirituality (measured by the OSVS) is similar to the Cronbach's alpha coefficients previously reported by Kolodinsky et al. (2008) for an

international sample (0.93) and by Van Der Walt and De Klerk (2014) for a South African sample (0.95). It is slightly higher than the Cronbach's alpha coefficient reported by Van Der Walt (2018) for a South African sample (0.83). The total scale had a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.92, which can be regarded as excellent. This shows that the measuring instrument had excellent internal consistency. Therefore, one may conclude that the measuring instrument was reliable for the current sample. A factor analysis with oblique (oblimin) rotation was utilised to determine the construct validity of the subscale measuring organisational spirituality. As the majority of the items loaded onto one factor, it was decided to regard organisational spirituality as a one-factor solution rather than as a three-factor solution. This is similar to the findings of Van Der Walt and De Klerk (2014) and Van Der Walt (2018).

### Measures of central tendency

Table 1 presents the measures of central tendency for ethical behaviour components and organisational spirituality. The median represents the 50% mark in each case.

As can be seen from Table 1, only fairness has a mean score that exceeds the median and responsibility has a mean score that matches the 50% mark. However, respect, honesty and organisational spirituality have mean scores below the 50% mark. This shows that the respondents evaluated their behaviour as responsible and fair, but not necessarily as respectful and honest. Furthermore, they did not perceive their organisations to have spiritual values.

### Correlations between workplace spirituality and ethical behaviour

Table 2 reflects the correlations between workplace spirituality and ethical behaviour.

From the data in Table 2, it is clear that organisational spirituality is statistically significantly correlated with responsibility (0.251) and fairness (0.286). Although Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient confirmed relationships between many of the variables measured, it was necessary to perform a regression analysis in order to establish whether workplace spirituality influences ethical behaviour.

### Multiple regression analysis

Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the influence of workplace spirituality on responsibility and fairness. Note that normality was assumed.

From the data in Table 3, it is clear that organisational spirituality had a statistically significant influence on responsibility. The influence of organisational spirituality amounted to 25.1%. Moreover, organisational spirituality had a statistically significant influence on fairness which amounted to 21.6%.

**TABLE 1:** Data on levels of scores of ethical behaviour components measured.

| Value                       | N   | Mean  | Median | SD    | Min | Max | Items |
|-----------------------------|-----|-------|--------|-------|-----|-----|-------|
| Responsibility              | 124 | 28.00 | 28     | 3.97  | 11  | 35  | 7     |
| Respect                     | 124 | 19.86 | 20     | 4.93  | 6   | 30  | 6     |
| Fairness                    | 124 | 27.55 | 27     | 4.65  | 15  | 35  | 7     |
| Honesty                     | 124 | 20.69 | 21     | 5.62  | 6   | 30  | 6     |
| Organisational spirituality | 127 | 69.27 | 72     | 16.43 | 3   | 99  | 20    |

SD, standard deviation; Min, minimum; Max, maximum.

**TABLE 2:** Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient results for the variables measured.

| Variable                    | Category | Responsibility | Respect | Fairness | Honesty | Organisational spirituality |
|-----------------------------|----------|----------------|---------|----------|---------|-----------------------------|
| Responsibility              | R        | 1              | -       | -        | -       | -                           |
|                             | p        | -              | -       | -        | -       | -                           |
| Respect                     | R        | 0.035          | 1       | -        | -       | -                           |
|                             | p        | 0.703          | -       | -        | -       | -                           |
| Fairness                    | R        | 0.603**        | 0.179*  | 1        | -       | -                           |
|                             | p        | 0.000          | 0.047   | -        | -       | -                           |
| Honesty                     | R        | 0.171          | 0.595** | 0.286**  | 1       | -                           |
|                             | p        | 0.058          | 0.000   | 0.001    | -       | -                           |
| Organisational spirituality | R        | 0.251**        | -0.060  | 0.216*   | -0.060  | 1                           |
|                             | p        | 0.005          | 0.511   | 0.017    | 0.511   | -                           |
|                             | p        | 0.252          | 0.014   | 0.739    | 0.676   | 0.623                       |

\* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ .

**TABLE 3:** Multiple regression analysis results of organisational spirituality, responsibility and fairness.

|                             | Unstandardised coefficients |       | Standardised coefficients |       |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------|---------------------------|-------|
|                             | $\beta$                     | SE    | $\beta$                   | T     |
| <b>Responsibility</b>       |                             |       |                           |       |
| Organisational spirituality | 0.061                       | 0.021 | 0.251                     | 2.849 |
| $\Delta R^2$                | 0.055                       | -     | -                         | -     |
| $R^2$                       | 0.063                       | -     | -                         | -     |
| F                           | 8.116                       | -     | -                         | -     |
| p                           | 0.005**                     | -     | -                         | -     |
| <b>Fairness</b>             |                             |       |                           |       |
| Organisational spirituality | 0.061                       | 0.025 | 0.216                     | 2.431 |
| $\Delta R^2$                | 0.039                       | -     | -                         | -     |
| $R^2$                       | 0.047                       | -     | -                         | -     |
| F                           | 5.911                       | -     | -                         | -     |
| p                           | 0.017*                      | -     | -                         | -     |

$\beta$ , Beta; SE, standard error;  $\Delta R^2$ , adjusted R-squared;  $R^2$ , R-squared; F, f-value;

\* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ .

## Discussion

### Outline of results

The secondary research objective of this study was to determine the extent to which project managers agree with the ethical values identified by the PMI as important. Four values were measured, namely, responsibility, respect, fairness and honesty. From the findings presented, it was noted that the value of responsibility was viewed neutrally, while only fairness solicited a positive response from the respondents. The respondents mostly disagreed with the statements regarding respect and honesty. Thus, one may conclude that the respondents agreed mostly with the fairness value identified by the PMI. The findings regarding ethical values can possibly be attributed to the project management environment, which is fast-paced and complex,

and therefore rife with ethical dilemmas. Thus, one wonders whether it is not more appropriate to follow a dual approach, focussing on both a moral and descriptive approach in dealing with these ethical dilemmas. This is mainly because project managers are often not even aware that they are facing ethical dilemmas, where such awareness requires advanced moral development or moral awareness of sensitivity (Daniels, Diddams, & Van Duzer, 2011).

In line with Kohlberg's (1969) theory of moral development, it is argued that it is only in the sixth stage of moral development that right is understood as consisting of universal moral principles, such as justice, equality of human rights and respect for human dignity (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011). These latter authors further state that adults who advance to this sixth stage are not only aware of these moral principles but also commit to these principles, which consequently guide their behaviour. Thus, it seems necessary that project managers develop morality in order for them to accept universal moral principles to guide their behaviour. Unfortunately, not all adults advance to this stage of cognitive moral development, but it seems to be necessary for project managers to reach this developmental phase of morality because they are continually facing ethical dilemmas.

In response to Kohlberg's (1969) theory, Rest's (1986) theory and Jones' (1991) theory focus on moral judgement, which is facilitated by both intuitive emotional processing and controlled cognitive processing. They propose that moral judgement will lead to moral intent, and that this may possibly lead to moral behaviour. However, in this process one component will not necessarily lead to the other, and therefore other variables, such as experience and reflection, have been proposed as influencing variables of cognitive behaviour. Unfortunately, research has not identified causal relationships between any of the mentioned variables. Previous research has found that cognitive moral development is only moderately predictive of unethical choices (Kish-Gephard et al., 2010, cited in Moore, Detert, Treviño, Baker, & Mayer, 2012). Moreover, even if a person is sophisticated in the way he or she deliberately reasons about ethical decisions, he or she may not necessarily behave ethically.

The primary research objective of this study was to establish to what degree, if any, workplace spirituality influences project managers' ethical behaviour. The findings of the study indicated that workplace spirituality influenced ethical behaviour to some extent, as it promotes responsibility and fairness, which are key values of the PMI. This shows that if organisations adopt spiritual values and promote a spirituality-based culture, ethical behaviour and possibly affective well-being and mental health could be encouraged.

It is postulated that workplace spirituality, life satisfaction, mental health and ethical behaviour are related. Firstly, the study found that workplace spirituality is related to fairness. Perceived fairness has also been found to be related to affective

well-being, which is a component of mental health (Soto, DiDona, Aquililla, Ramirez, & Marrero, 2018). Lombardo, Jones, Wang, Shen and Goldner (2018) report a strong correlation between life satisfaction and mental health. The relationship between life satisfaction and workplace spirituality is implied by Garcia-Zamor (2003), who postulates that spirituality in the workplace creates a new organisational culture in which individuals feel happier. An empirical study conducted by Sawatzky, Ratner and Chiu (2005) confirmed the relationship between spirituality and quality of life (or life satisfaction). A positive relationship has also been found between meaning and purpose in life (a core dimension of workplace spirituality) and life satisfaction (Reker & Cousins, 1979). However, workplace spirituality should not be seen as a quick fix to reduce unethical behaviour and improve mental health, and unless there is honest commitment by organisational leaders to transform organisations into humanised and spirituality-based workplaces, not much will be achieved in terms of promoting positive affect and behaviour.

### Limitations and recommendations

This study has revealed the importance of promoting workplace spirituality within the context of project management. Unfortunately, previous research studies on workplace spirituality have not been extensively conducted within this field of study, and, as such, more confirmatory empirical studies are needed to confirm the importance of promoting workplace spirituality. It is therefore suggested that research regarding ethical behaviour should be extended; in particular, future research studies should focus on the relationship between intuition, reflection, and experience and ethical conduct. Although the rational decision-making approach and a descriptive approach to ethical behaviour are to some extent appropriate, it is also necessary to confirm theories that propose that factors such as intuition, reflection and experience are predictors of ethical behaviour.

### Conclusion

The primary research objective of this study was to establish whether workplace spirituality influences project managers' ethical behaviour. From the above discussion, it is clear that workplace spirituality influences project managers' ethical behaviour. The study provides an understanding of the ethical behaviour of project managers in terms of their theoretical orientations and the values that are promoted by the PMI. Although the descriptive approach to ethical behaviour has been criticised, it still seems relevant and necessary because of the complexity of work that project managers are faced with. However, having a code of ethics would not ensure ethical behaviour, but it could advance a collective understanding of ethical behaviour within the project management profession.

From the results presented, it is evident that organisations will benefit from creating spirituality-based workplaces in order to promote ethical acts within an environment that is

rife with questionable business practices. The findings of this study hold many insights for the project management profession, as well as higher education institutions that train project managers. It is necessary that future studies continue to focus on possible influencing variables of ethical behaviour so as to obtain an in-depth understanding of this form of destructive behaviour, which is continually increasing. By promoting organisational spirituality, and consequently mental health, well-being and ethical conduct, future business success may be enhanced in an increasingly uncertain external business environment.

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The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

## Authors' contributions

F.v.d.W. is the first and main author of this article and contributed majorly to the writing of the article. P.S. was the supervisor and also contributed to the writing of the article.

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## Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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